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ABSTRACT

Reported in this monograph are the results from a survey of composition teachers in the City University of New York (CUNY). The questionnaire used for the survey sought (1) to obtain quantitative data about teachers' instructional practices and about their perceptions of the impact of the Writing Skills Assessment Test (WSAT) of minimum writing competence; and (2) to determine whether CUNY writing faculty use different instructional practices and evaluative standards for remedial and nonremedial writing students. Findings show that the majority of teachers require students to do in-class writing once or twice a week, and most frequently assign the expository essay; place more emphasis on teaching essay organization and development than on teaching grammar; and provide detailed instructions for their writing assignments and write extensive commentary on students' papers. Approximately half of the respondents felt that the testing program has not had much impact on their courses, instructions, or assignments. The remainder believed that the WSAT had influenced them to assign more in-class argumentative essays and to place more emphasis on the process and content of writing. According to the survey, respondents use similar instructional practices in both remedial and nonremedial courses, the major difference being that writing is assigned more frequently to nonremedial students. Finally, the major cause of failing grades for both remedial and nonremedial students was reported as problems in developing and organizing ideas. (CMG)

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SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The findings reported in this study were collected by means of an anonymous questionnaire mailed to 960 faculty teaching composition courses in the seventeen undergraduate CUNY colleges. Four hundred and twenty three teachers responded. These respondents confirm many of the trends observed in College Survey: A Description of the Skills Programs at the CUNY Colleges and the recent Basic Skills Programs at the City University of New York: Writing, surveys conducted by the Instructional Resource Center in 1976 and 1981 respectively.

> The majority of them require their students to do in-class writing once or twice a week. Their most frequent assignment is the short expository essay.
>
> The majority of them place more emphasis on teaching essay organization and development than on teaching grammar.
>
> The majority of them provide detailed instructions for their writing assignments and write extensive commentary on students' papers.

These respondents use similar instructional practices in both their remedial (basic) and their non-remedial composition courses. In both types of courses, these teachers try to help students organize their ideas coherently, present these ideas in detail, and prepare their writing for other readers. The respondents also indicated that the major causes of failing grades on writing assignments for both remedial and non-remedial composition students are problems in developing and organizing ideas. The major difference in the responses of remedial and of non-remedial teachers is that writing is assigned more frequently to non-remedial students.

Finally, the majority of the respondents are satisfied with the CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test (the WAT), the university-wide test of minimum writing competence. Approximately half the respondents feel that the WAT testing program has not had much impact on their courses, their instruction, or their assignments. The remainder believe that the WAT has influenced their instruction: they assign more in-class argumentative essays than they did prior to the WAT and they place more emphasis on the process and content of writing than they used to place.

INTRODUCTION

Six years have passed since the publication of Mina Shaughnessy's landmark text on teaching writing, Errors and Expectations. Shaughnessy's analyses of the writing problems of open admissions students at The City University of New York (CUNY) have had a profound influence on writing programs and on writing faculty. She provided us with insights into the ways in which adult learners acquire language skills and into the complexity of their writing problems. Not only did her ideas affect writing teachers' perceptions of students' errors, but her conception of the developmental nature of basic writing skills also influenced the course structure of many CUNY writing programs.

Some of Shaughnessy's influences are described in Teaching Basic Skills in College (Trillin, 1980), the book developed from the 1976 surveys of all CUNY basic skills programs (conducted by the staff of CUNY's Instructional Resource Center in 1975 and 1976). This book describes the typical CUNY writing program as consisting of a sequence of three levels of courses, a structure recommended by Shaughnessy. In addition, the CUNY writing program course syllabi and teaching methodology described in this book also showed Shaughnessy's influence: the writing instructors reported that they required frequent writing assignments in a variety of modes, provided detailed instructions for their assignments, offered students frequent opportunities to

rewrite their work, and referred students for individual tutoring in writing labs.

By 1980, many of the trends observed in the 1976 surveys of CUNY writing programs had become firmly established. A new survey, conducted in 1980, (Slaughter and Wiener, 1981) revealed discernible commonalities in the structure and the content of writing programs and in the criteria used to evaluate students' writing proficiency. In part, these commonalities were the result of the implementation of the CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test (the WAT) which set a university-wide level of minimum writing competence. The WAT was part of the Freshman Skills Assessment Program, developed in response to a mandate by the Board of Higher Education in April 1976 and implemented in Fall 1978. All matriculated students entering CUNY are tested in reading, writing, and mathematics, and students who do not meet CUNY standards are assigned to appropriate remediation at their colleges. All students must meet CUNY standards prior to entering their junior year.

The WAT was developed in 1977 by the Chancellor's Task Force on Writing, a committee composed of experienced teachers and researchers in basic writing. This committee believed that the WAT should consist entirely of a writing sample because that would provide the most accurate indication of students' writing ability and because it would have important pedagogical implications for high school and college classrooms (CUNY Task Force on Writing, 1978). These beliefs also reflected Shaughnessy's ideas--her conviction that writing should be

assessed only by means of writing samples and her descriptions of the features that characterize the spectrum of students' writing abilities.

The 1981 survey of CUNY writing programs found that the three-level writing sequence now exists on every campus: each college has at least two levels of basic writing courses to assist students who have failed the WAT and at least one level of freshman composition required of students who have passed the WAT. The 1981 survey also revealed that CUNY writing faculty place less emphasis on the teaching of grammar as a means of improving written composition and more emphasis on the process and the content of writing. In addition, the 1981 survey found a diversity in instructional approaches used by writing faculty and a wide range of faculty responses to the WAT:

> Although the three-level sequence of courses is popular, there is, however, no uniform methodology in teaching the courses. Although the CUNY writing test has certainly had an impact on classroom instruction, it is too early to assess the nature or the extent of this impact. (Slaughter and Wiener, 1981, p. viii)

The survey described in the following report was undertaken to provide further information about the trends identified in the 1976 and the 1981 surveys of CUNY writing programs. My objective in designing the questionnaire used for this survey was to obtain quantitative data about writing teachers' instructional practices and about their perceptions of the WAT's impact, data that would clarify the anecdotal descriptions presented in the earlier surveys. A further objective of this survey was to determine whether CUNY writing faculty use different instructional

practices and evaluative standards for their remedial (or basic) writing students than they do for their non-remedial students. Do teachers who teach only remedial writing courses have different objectives, concerns, and methods than do teachers who teach only non-remedial writing courses? And how do the strategies and the standards of teachers who teach both types of courses vary?

The information presented in this report may be used to shape administrative policies, to restructure writing course curricula, and to provide students with information about the nature and extent of the writing demands that will be made in their composition courses. Writing faculty can use the results of this survey to compare their practices and their perceptions to those of their colleagues teaching similar courses and similar students. All of us who teach writing at CUNY share the need for more information about students' writing problems and about effective strategies for instruction and evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

The data reported in this study were collected by means of an eight-page questionnaire that was mailed in May 1981 and again in September 1981 to 960 full-time and part-time faculty teaching writing courses in all seventeen undergraduate CUNY colleges. The questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter stating the nature and the purpose of the survey and guaranteeing the respondent's anonymity. The questionnaire and cover letter are reproduced in full in Appendix A. The mailing list was compiled from lists of all faculty teaching any type of writing course in English, Academic Skills, or English as a Second Language Departments; these lists were provided by chairpersons and program coordinators and by the Office of Academic Affairs.

All seventeen colleges are represented in these results. The data analyses are based on 423 returned questionnaires (a 44% response rate). The figures for certain questions may be lower than this number of total returns, indicating that the question was not answered by all respondents or was answered erroneously (i.e., with two codes) by some respondents.

The entire questionnaire was precoded to facilitate data-processing. The coding of the "open" questions was done by two graduate students whom I trained. These coders agreed with approximately 90% of each other's coding decisions; I resolved the disagreements.

Before discussing any results, I would like to emphasize the fact that there are several methodological problems caused by the

use of questionnaires to survey teachers' behavior and attitudes. It is extremely difficult to construct questions and response categories that will tap the perceptions of all the respondents and that do not reflect the investigator's hypotheses or beliefs. I tried to avoid these difficulties by submitting each version of the questionnaire to faculty in different colleges and in different departments and by incorporating their revisions in each successive draft.

One problem with questionnaire-type inquiries is that teachers' responses may not accurately reflect their actual beliefs or behaviors despite the promise of complete anonymity. In addition, my decision to keep the responses anonymous made it impossible for me to weight the responses from different faculty groups and from different colleges in order to extrapolate from the survey sample to the larger population (of the more than one thousand teachers currently teaching writing courses at CUNY). This means that the survey sample may not be very representative of CUNY writing faculty, and, thus, the responses must be interpreted cautiously. Although there can be questions about the representativeness of the sample, nevertheless about half of the faculty teaching writing at CUNY did answer the questionnaire.

A problem with "open" questions in a questionnaire (questions without any response categories) is that they are open to different interpretations. The answers to the open questions on the questionnaire used for this survey were diverse and lengthy, and it was difficult to fit them into the categories

devised for coding them. Some simplifications of these responses had to be made, but I tried to present the full range of these responses as accurately as possible. I take responsibility for any biases, simplifications, or misinterpretations in the reporting of these responses, and I invite everyone interested in reading them to examine the complete set of questionnaires which is available at the Instructional Resource Center, Office of Academic Affairs, 535 East 80th Street, New York, New York.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE

The most significant characteristic of the faculty who responded to this survey is their type of appointment: almost three-quarters of them are full-time tenured or tenure-track teachers. Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents by rank and line. This finding--that the majority of the respondents are tenured or tenure track faculty responsible for introductory, remedial, and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction at CUNY--is interesting, especially in light of the results of a recent national survey of post-secondary writing programs which showed that the bulk of writing instruction in private and public colleges is done by non-tenure track faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate assistants (Witte, Meyer, Miller, & Faigley, 1981, p. 44).

Moreover, almost half of these full-time tenured or tenure-track respondents teach remedial writing courses (see Table 2), and many of them teach more than one remedial composition course. In fact, as Table 3 shows, the majority of them teach courseloads consisting of two-thirds, three-fourths, or 100% remedial writing courses. The finding that remedial writing instruction is the main responsibility of so many permanent faculty members can be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, it suggests that CUNY has made a genuine, long-term commitment to educating underprepared students. On the other hand, it may indicate that student interest in literature and linguistics has waned and the

Table 1. Distribution of Survey Sample by Rank and Type of Appointment

(N = 418)

	Full-Time Appointment		Part-Time Appointment		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professor	66	16%	0	0%	66	16%
Associate Professor	101	24	1	0	102	24
Assistant Professor	74	18	25	6	99	24
Instructor	24	6	12	3	36	9
Lecturer	32	8	61	14	93	22
Other	1	0	21	5	22	5
Total	298	72%	120	28%	418	100%

Table 2. Percentage of Full-Time and of Part Time Faculty Who Teach Remedial Writing Courses

(N = 403)

	Full-Time Faculty		Part-Time Faculty	
	N	%	N	%
Do Teach Remediation	184	64%	88	77%
Do Not Teach Remediation	104	36%	27	33%
Total	288	100%	115	100%

Table 3. Percentage of Faculty Groups Distributed According to the Percentage of Remedial Writing Courseload They Teach

(N = 400)

	Lecturer		Instructor		Assistant Professor		Associate Professor		Full Professor		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	16	18%	6	17%	22	24%	37	37%	43	68%	7	35%
One-Fourth	4	5	0	0	6	6	5	5	1	1	0	0
One-Third	4	5	1	3	10	11	20	20	8	13	0	0
One-Half	16	18	5	14	16	17	10	10	4	6	4	20
Two-Thirds	4	5	1	3	9	10	13	13	4	6	0	0
Three-Fourths	1	0	3	8	4	4	6	6	1	1	0	0
100%	43	49	19	55	26	28	9	9	3	5	9	45
Total	88	100%	35	100%	93	100%	100	100%	64	100%	20	100%

only courses available for tenured English professors to teach are composition courses.

Another striking characteristic of the survey sample is their many years of experience teaching college-level courses. As Table 4 shows, the majority of the respondents have ten or more years experience. The implications of this finding on quality of teaching are unclear. The respondents may be teachers whose extensive experience teaching writing to open admissions students has enabled them to develop successful strategies for helping students write better, or they may be literature teachers who are required to teach composition courses. While the effects of teacher experience may depend upon the individual teacher, the effects of another important variable, class size, seem more constant across different types of teachers. According to Richard Lloyd-Jones and Ross Winterowd, large class sizes may have a negative effect on students' writing skills:

> As class size increases, it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to read essays so they tend to assign fewer and fewer of them. The less writing students do, the poorer they will be at written expression.
> (NAEP-Assessment of Writing: Mechanics, 1975, p. 44)

The majority of the survey respondents reported that they teach an average class size of 16-25 students (see Table 5), the figure recommended by the Board of Directors of the National Council of Teachers of English:

> No more than 25 students should be permitted in any writing class. Ideally, classes should be limited to 15 or 20. Students cannot learn to write without writing. In sections larger than 25, teachers cannot possibly give student writing

Table 4. Distribution of Survey Sample by Years of College Teaching Experience (N = 423)

	N	%
4 or fewer	53	12%
5-9	78	18
10-14	121	29
15-19	83	20
20 or more	88	21
	423	100%

Table 5. Distribution of Survey Sample's Average Class Size

(N = 418)

	N	%
15 or fewer	24	5%
16-25	281	68
26-35	108	26
36-45	4	1
46 or more	1	0
Total	418	100%

> the immediate and individual response necessary for growth and improvement.
> (NCTE Board of Directors, 1976, p. 2)

However, 26% of the respondents reported an average class size of 26-35 students. While there is little evidence concerning the relationship between class size and writing instruction, it seems likely that large composition classes (26 or more students) make it difficult for teachers to require frequent writing, to read and respond to student writing, and to hold frequent conferences with students.

Thus, while one quarter of the responding teachers reported class sizes that are, in my opinion, far too large for effective writing instruction, the remainder reported class sizes small enough to permit them to assign writing frequently and to provide individual feedback. The extent to which they engage in these activities will be discussed in the next section.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES REPORTED BY THE SURVEY SAMPLE

The 1976 and 1981 surveys of CUNY writing programs provided an overview of teachers' assumptions and instructional practices and revealed that their theories and their techniques were similar. The one common belief that most writing faculty shared (according to the program directors interviewed for the surveys) was a belief that students learn to write better by writing frequently and by receiving frequent responses to their writing. Faculty seemed to be following Shaughnessy's (1977) recommendations that students be given "supervised writing practice" at least three to four times a week (p. 288) and that teachers act as editors for their students, conferring on papers in progress and training students to proofread and edit (p. 85).

However, the responses to the 1976 and 1981 surveys were primarily the testimony of writing program directors, and there was some reason to question the extent to which writing teachers actually practice what their program directors preach. Most of the respondents to my survey do assign writing frequently--they report that they require their students to do some type of in-class writing (or drafting or revising) once or twice a week. And, as Table 6 shows, they assign writing more frequently to remedial writing classes than they do to non-remedial writing classes. In order to discover if there were differences in the responses of the three different sub-groups of teachers (those who teach only remedial courses, those who teach only

Table 6. Weekly Frequency of Writing Assignments

	Remedial (N = 277)		Non-Remedial (N = 308)	
	N	%	N	%
Never	3	1%	11	4%
Once	115	42	247	80
Twice	105	38	35	11
Three Times	39	14	11	4
Four or More Times	15	5	4	1
	277	100%	308	100%

non-remedial, and those who teach both), we examined crosstabulations of the three sets of responses. Two interesting patterns were revealed. Teachers who teach only remedial courses assign writing more frequently than do the other types of teachers: almost seventy percent of the "remedial only" teachers require their students to do three or more writing assignments a week. Furthermore, teachers who teach both types of courses assign writing more frequently to their remedial classes than to their non-remedial classes.

These findings indicate that the majority of the respondents do place a premium on regular weekly in-class writing, especially for students in remedial writing courses. And this writing usually takes the form of a short expository essay. The most frequently occurring type of writing assignment for both remedial and non-remedial courses is the short essay (1-3 pages); almost 90% of the teachers reported that they assign it four or more times a term. But students in remedial courses do not always begin with a multiparagraph essay--about a third of the teachers of remedial courses wrote that they have their students write only paragraphs early in the term, before moving on to essay assignments.

Other frequently assigned types of writing in remedial courses include grammatical exercises, reports from data, and journal writing (see Table 7). Sub-group analysis revealed that twice as many teachers of remedial courses assign journal writing as do teachers of non-remedial courses.

Table 7. Frequency of Different Types of Writing Assignments per Term

	For Remedial Courses (N = 277) Mode*	For Non-Remedial Courses (N = 308) Mode
1-3 page theme/essay	4	4
other (grammar exercises, reports, letters etc.)	4	4
journal	4	0
review/critique	0	1
abstract/summary	0	1
4-8 page theme/essay	0	1
9 or more page theme/essay	0	0
research paper	0	1

*Mode = response that was selected most frequently by the respondents

Students in the respondents' non-remedial writing courses are assigned a wider variety of papers: in addition to being required to write frequent short essays, they are also asked to write letters, editorials, fiction, abstracts, reviews, longer essays, and research papers. Approximately one quarter of the respondents who teach non-remedial courses wrote that they assign a research paper at the end of the semester to give students the opportunity to consolidate the various rhetorical skills that they have practiced in earlier assignments.

Not only do these respondents report that they assign frequent in-class writing, but they also say that their assignments are frequently preceded or accompanied by specific instructions on carrying out the assignments. There is a small literature on the effects of specifying various types of instructions for experienced and for basic writers. The instructions most frequently cited as contributing to improvements in students' writing are instructions about the "rhetorical context" of the assignment--information about the audience, the purpose, and the mode (Crowhurst and Piche, 1979; Emig, 1971; Moffett, 1968; Winterowd, 1975). However, several experimental studies of the effects of variations in these instructions do not support the assumption that specifying instructions about the rhetorical context enhances students' writing performance (Greenberg, 1981; Hoetker, 1980; Keech, 1980).

Nevertheless, the CUNY composition teachers who answered this survey seem to believe in the value of specifying

instructions for their writing assignments. As Table 8 shows, about three-quarters of the respondents reported that they "specify at great length" instructions about the techniques for development, the purpose, and the format of their assignments for both remedial and non-remedial courses. Slightly less than half of them also reported that they provide specific instructions about the number of drafts of assignments that they expect students to do.

In addition to providing specific instructions about development, purpose, format, and number of drafts, the respondents also wrote that they provide instructions about outlining assignments. Almost no research has been conducted on the effects of outlining prior to writing, yet many composition teachers advise students to outline as a way of organizing their thoughts. And every college composition text that I have ever used includes a section stressing the importance of outlining as a means of planning one's ideas and the relationships among those ideas, such as the following paragraph from a recent edition of a very popular handbook:

> Make it a habit to construct a complete outline for every piece of writing you do. An outline provides you with a working plan for organizing your paper. It ensures that your development of the subject will be logical and orderly, and enables you to distinguish clearly between important ideas and less important ones. (Leggett, Mead, & Charvatt , 1978, p. 168)

However, recent research into the nature of the writing process has shown that many writers discover their ideas while they are writing and that making these writers outline before they write may inhibit their composing processes (Emig, 1971; Flower &

Table 8. Percentage of Respondents Who "Specify at Great Length" Instructions for Writing Assignments

	Remedial Responses (N = 261)		Non-Remedial Responses (N = 288)	
	N	%	N	%
Techniques for Development	231	85%	224	75%
Purpose	196	72	221	72
Format	181	66	177	58
Number of Drafts	131	48	119	40
Audience	101	39	114	40
Length	100	38	97	34
References Sources	56	23	156	54

Hayes, 1979; Murray, 1978). This research on the composing process has also suggested that different types of prewriting strategies (such as brainstorming, talking, and freewriting) can be far more productive for students than writing outlines.

Yet, the survey respondents still stress the importance of outlining: approximately seventy percent of them require their students to write outlines (prior to writing assignments) always or frequently (see Table 9). Outlining may be of little help to students (or it may even be counterproductive), yet these teachers still rely on it.

About three-quarters of these respondents believe in the importance of having students revise and rewrite their assignments always or frequently (see Table 10). At first glance, this finding seems very positive--most of these teachers are offering their students frequent opportunities to reread, rethink, and rewrite their essays. However, if revision is narrowly conceived as copy-editing, then it may be useless or even counterproductive for students. Indeed, several researchers have shown that students frequently perceive revising as proof-reading or cleaning up their writing rather than as reconceiving or changing it (Bridwell, 1980; Perl, 1979; Sommers, 1980).

Thus, the findings that these teachers encourage their students to outline and to revise their writing assignments are open to various interpretations. Students may find both strategies effective and useful if their teachers present them as flexible, changeable techniques for discovering and reconceiving their ideas. Or they find these strategies artificial and

Table 9. Frequency of Required Outlining

	Never		Seldom		Frequently		Always	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Remedial (N = 276)	22	8	56	20	97	35	101	37
Non-Remedial (N = 316)	27	9	67	21	129	41	93	29

Table 10. Frequency of Required Revising/Rewriting

	Never		Seldom		Frequently		Always	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Remedial (N = 273)	10	3	41	15	106	39	116	43
Non-Remedial (N = 312)	19	6	78	25	125	40	90	29

unproductive if these are presented as linear stages or steps that everyone must follow.

Furthermore, the quality of students' revisions may depend on the content of teachers' feedback that motivated the revising. The respondents reported that they write extensive commentary on their students' papers (about half write several sentences and about half write several paragraphs), in both remedial and non-remedial courses. The importance of this finding depends on the nature of these teachers' comments: comments that respond to the students' ideas and logic and that suggest useful strategies for revision can help students clarify their writing; comments that ignore the student's purpose or that focus on errors may confuse students or make them think that revising simply means proofreading and correcting errors. In her research on teachers' comments, Nancy Sommers found that:

> This appropriation of the text by the teachers happens particularly when teachers identify errors in usage, diction, and style in a first draft and ask students to correct these errors when they revise; such comments give the students an impression of the importance of these errors that is all out of proportion to how they should view these errors at this point in the process. (Sommers, 1982, p. 150)

The teachers who responded to this survey say that much of their commentary involves correction of students' errors in their first drafts: about a third of them "correct all the errors" in their students' writing and about one quarter of them "correct some of the errors." The remainder wrote that they "identify but do not correct the errors" in their students' papers. Interestingly, these responses were similar for remedial and non-remedial

courses. These findings indicate that the respondents spend a great deal of time reading, correcting, and commenting on students' writing. They also indicate that these teachers are very concerned with correctness--many respondents wrote that much of their commentary focuses on errors rather than on conceptual or on rhetorical problems.

Yet, when these teachers were asked to rank order a list of student writing problems in terms of how each affected their judgment of writing quality, they indicated that the problem that concerns them most in their students' writing is "inadequate development of ideas." As Table 11 shows, inadequate development is considered a more serious problem than errors in grammar or syntax in the writing of remedial writers and of non-remedial writers. Furthermore, teachers of non-remedial writing students indicated that problems with weak organization, with lack of details, and with lack of coherence affect their quality judgments more than do problems with syntax, grammar, or mechanics.

These findings suggest that there may be a difference between what these teachers believe to be important in their students' writing and what they do when they respond to that writing. They say that errors in logic and development substantially mar students' papers, yet they devote much of their response to error correction. Perhaps if they were to ignore the grammatical errors in students' first drafts and to concentrate on points where the meaning or the logic breaks down, their

Table 11. Percentage of Survey Sample Who Believe that the Problems Listed Substantially Mar the Quality of their Students' Writing

	Remedial (N = 273)		Non-Remedial (N = 305)	
	N	%	N	%
Inadequate development	245	89	253	82
Weak organization	216	78	236	77
Lack of details	217	79	229	74
Lack of coherence	231	83	203	67
Sentence structure errors	238	85	172	86
Grammar/usage errors	221	81	170	55
Diction/vocabulary errors	176	64	122	40
Spelling/punctuation errors	171	62	119	39
Improper use of sources	68	25	111	38
Improper format	48	19	62	21

students might find it easier to develop and expand their ideas when they revise.

While problems with development and organization are considered the most serious faults by the majority of the respondents, errors in grammar and in sentence structure are also mentioned frequently as substantially marring students' writing. In addition, fifty-three respondents wrote in other problems which they believe substantially mar students' papers, including misinterpretation of the assignment, plagiarism, lack of original thought, illegibility, lateness, and extreme brevity.

Thus, according to the teachers surveyed for this report, the major causes of failing grades on writing assignments for both remedial and non-remedial students are similar: problems in development, organization, coherence, sentence structure, and grammar. Analysis of the three sub-groups of teachers revealed slightly different patterns concerning the effects of grammar and sentence structure errors. Eighty percent of the teachers who teach only remedial courses feel that grammar errors seriously affect the quality of their students' writing as compared to the 60% of the teachers who teach only non-remedial writing courses who feel similarly. And 85% of those who teach only remedial courses feel that sentence structure errors seriously mar students' writing quality as opposed to the 55% of those who teach both remedial and non-remedial courses who feel similarly.

Despite the contradiction between teachers' concerns and the type of comments they make on students' papers (discussed earlier), these teachers indicated that writing comments on

papers is their preferred method of dealing with students' writing problems. More than 85% of them reported that they always write comments on students' papers. More than half of them deal with students' writing problems by holding frequent conferences with individual students or by devoting part of a class session to a particular problem. About a third of the respondents also refer students to writing labs to work on specific problems in their papers. The only method mentioned more than once in the space provided for the "other methods" category in the questionnaire was "in-class group work." And one teacher wrote in that he or she uses "harangues, pleas, jokes, threats, and warnings."

To summarize this section, many of the instructional practices reported by this survey sample are similar to those reported in the 1976 and 1981 surveys of CUNY writing programs. This survey's respondents assign writing frequently (usually in the form of short, expository essays) and they provide specific instructions for carrying out their writing assignments. They believe that outlining is a valuable tool for planning ideas and they believe in the importance of having students revise and rewrite their assignments. Their favorite method for dealing with students' writing problems is providing extensive comments on papers, most of them focusing on errors and ways of correcting these errors. Despite the fact that they spend much time correcting students' written errors, they believe that the most serious problem in their students' writing is inadequate development of ideas. Other problems in student writing which

concern them are faulty organization, sentence structure, and grammar.

Finally, the majority of the respondents believe that their students have serious writing problems. In answer to a question about the respondents' general perceptions of the writing skills of students in their composition courses during the past few years, about 80% of the teachers reported that the skills of their remedial students are "poor" or "very poor." Surprisingly, about 45% reported similar perceptions of the skills of their non-remedial writing students. It seems that students in freshman composition have serious writing problems as well.

In addition to providing further support for the trends identified by the earlier surveys, this survey shows that the majority of the responding CUNY writing faculty use strikingly similar instructional practices and evaluative standards for their remedial and their non-remedial composition students. Both types of students are required to do in-class writing every week and are frequently assigned short expository essays. Furthermore, the types of problems in students' writing that concern their teachers are similar for remedial and non-remedial students, as are the methods that these teachers use for dealing with these problems. The sub-group analyses of the different groups of teachers indicated that all three groups ("remedial only," "non-remedial only," and those who teach both types of courses) have similar perceptions of students' writing problems and use similar approaches and techniques.

All of these findings examined together suggest that teaching remedial composition and teaching non-remedial composition at CUNY are similar experiences except for the fact that the writing problems of remedial students are more severe. Composition courses at CUNY (and probably at most universities) seem to constitute a continuum--the differences in instruction in remedial, freshman, and upper-level writing courses are differences in degree not in kind.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CUNY WAT REPORTED BY THE SURVEY SAMPLE

The CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test (WAT) was developed by the first Chancellor's Task Force on Writing in response to the 1976 Board of Higher Education mandate that all CUNY students must demonstrate that they have attained a level of proficiency in basic learning skills necessary to cope successfully with advanced academic work. It is part of the Freshman Skills Assessment Program, in effect since Fall, 1978. The writing test developed by this Task Force (a committee of experienced composition faculty) in 1977 consists of a 50-minute expository essay on an "agree or disagree" question which is scored holistically by faculty trained to use the six-point CUNY Evaluation Scale. A copy of a sample WAT question and of the Scale is included in Appendix B. All students in CUNY must pass the WAT (and a reading and a math test) by their junior year at CUNY.

A passing score on the WAT is now the agreed upon level of minimum writing competence at CUNY, but individual colleges are free to set higher standards for minimum competence and some do. As of Fall, 1981, all seventeen CUNY colleges use the WAT score as part of their placement criteria for writing courses. In addition, fourteen colleges now require passing the WAT as part of their exit criteria for basic or remedial writing courses.

However, it is important to remember that the decision to use the WAT as a placement or as an exit test is an individual college's decision; the WAT was created to assess minimum

writing proficiency at or before the completion of the sophomore year in college. The fact that so many of the colleges decided to use the WAT for placement and for exit indicates that faculty and administrators believe that the WAT does serve as an effective measure of the skills required for entrance into and exit from writing courses.

Prior to the establishment of the WAT, fifteen CUNY colleges were already using a holistically-scored essay exam for placement into composition courses. Ten of these fifteen supplemented the essay with one or more objective tests (of grammar, syntax, and mechanics). The other two colleges used only objective tests. None of the colleges used objective tests alone to determine exit from remedial composition courses prior to the implementation of the WAT. Three used a combination of essay and objective tests, twelve used holistically-scored essay tests alone, and two used "teacher judgment." Thus, for the fifteen colleges familiar with the techniques and procedures of holistic scoring, the WAT presented few major changes.

Initially, some of my colleagues teaching writing at CUNY colleges reacted to the WAT with suspicion, because after ten years of controlling our testing programs and our standards, suddenly we were being required to conform to standards legislated from "on high." However, most of us were extremely grateful that the test development committee chose an essay test format rather than an objective (multiple-choice) test. We were aware that a multiple-choice writing test would have been far less expensive and easier to administer to approximately 70,000

students each year. So we were pleased with the committee's conviction that an essay test was the most valid instrument for assessing students' writing competence:

> Precisely because it is not a multiple-choice test counting errors in mechanics and grammar, but an essay in which students express themselves and argue for their personal opinions, the CUNY Writing Assessment Test demonstrates that CUNY faculty are concerned about the student as a whole person--as a thinking, experimenting, expressive individual. (Brick, 1980, p. 28)

According to Slaughter and Wiener's (1981) survey, most writing program coordinators and faculty reported that their fears and objections concerning the WAT have since diminished and that they are satisfied with the clarity and the standardization provided by the WAT. Frequently mentioned positive effects of the WAT included uniform standards and testing apparatus and increased administrative focus on students' writing skills. In addition, the colleges now share a common definition of minimum competence in writing, and they have all provided a series of courses to address that need.

The effectiveness of remedial writing courses often depends on the effectiveness of the test or the procedure used to place students into each course. A good placement test enables students to receive writing instruction designed to meet their needs, and the majority of the faculty surveyed in this study feel that the WAT is an effective placement tool. Approximately 75% of the respondents consider the WAT to be as effective or more effective than the previous placement tests used at their college (see Table 12).

Table 12. Distribution of Responses to the Use of the WAT as a Placement Test

(N = 243)

	N	%
Don't know	29	12
Same effectiveness as previous test	56	23
More effective than previous test	119	49
Less effective than previous test	27	11
Better than previous test in some ways, but worse in other ways	12	5
	243	100%

Below is a sampling of the respondents' replies. Each reply is reproduced in full, and the number of replies for each category (i.e., "more effective, " "less effective," "no difference," "more effective in some ways and less effective in other ways," and "don't know") is proportionate to the total number of responses for each category.

> "In general, the WAT is a fairly accurate placement instrument. It is adequate because it requires that an essay be written."
>
> "The WAT serves as a crude, but generally effective placement instrument. It is certainly better than our former test which was a multiple-choice with emphasis on correctness of grammar, diction, etc., which in no way measured a student's ability to write."
>
> "It is not perfect but it is more reliable than any used before."
>
> "The WAT allows more accurate placement in the two levels of remedial courses."
>
> "I believe it is slightly more accurate. Of course, a great deal more attention has been paid to the standards, which are constantly discussed, and to the training of readers."
>
> "It's much more effective than previous tests chiefly because it is graded rigorously and relatively uniformly."
>
> "We always used an essay. The WAT takes more time and more work: 3 readers do what 1 used to."
>
> "I do not feel it is a more effective placement test than those used previously. Often the WAT questions are so lengthy and contain so much introductory or "preparatory" material that it is difficult to distinguish student writing from student "copying."
>
> "The effectiveness is about the same because our previous test was very similar."
>
> "WAT serves as a numerical watershed between levels of courses and as 'exit' test. Readers of WAT have sharpened their judgment with the help of

> WAT. The danger of WAT is mindless, mechanical application (and penalization of students). 'Tired' readers of WAT commit horrendous crimes! Double checking is not always the solution."
>
> "For very good and very poor students, the WAT is effective. For middle-range students, especially those who receive 4 or 5, the WAT is not always effective; i.e., some 4's are often actually 5's and vice versa. Therefore, putting 4's into a two-course sequence with failing students may present problems, and weak 5's need more help in beginning composition before going on to advanced composition."

The ESL teachers who responded to this survey were less satisfied with the WAT as a placement test than were the respondents who teach native speakers of English:

> "It is not as accurate as a cloze and/or grammar and listening comprehension tests."
>
> "Generally it is effective when dealing with native or near native proficiency. However, CUNY still mandates it for speakers of other languages. This, for ESL students, can be disastrous."

CUNY ESL teachers' dissatisfaction with the WAT as the sole criterion for placement has been documented in a recent survey of ESL programs at CUNY (De Leon, Slaughter, and Maiz, 1981). According to this survey, "most colleges have begun to supplement these (the WAT and the reading test) with their own ESL-specific instruments which permit finer discrimination and are matched to their own program structures. These may include personal interviews, aural comprehension tests, cloze tests, short-answer grammar tests, and in-class essays" (pp. xiv-xv). The responses of the ESL teachers surveyed in this study support this need for additional placement tests and procedures for ESL students at CUNY in order to ensure appropriate class placement and instruction.

The survey sample's responses to the use of the WAT as an exit test from their college's remedial writing sequence were generally less positive than their responses to the use of the test as a placement instrument. Slightly less than half the respondents feel that the WAT is as effective or is more effective than their previous exit test or procedure, and almost one-quarter feel that it is less effective (see Table 13). Some of these responses may be influenced by the fact that several colleges have only recently instituted the WAT as a remedial course exit exam, and faculty may not have had enough time or enough experience with it to make comparisons. Some may be influenced by the fact that, prior to the decision to use the WAT as part of the exit criteria from the remedial writing sequence, no departmental test had been in place.

> "The WAT is effective and more stringent than the previous placement test."
>
> "Prior exit exams were departmental, however each instructor read exams only from his/her sections. This meant that evaluations were not always objective, and many students whose skills were still rather weak passed. More uniform criteria and double/triple reading have reduced this problem. Most students who pass the WAT for exit are successful in regular freshman composition sections."
>
> "It's much more rigorous. Teachers can on longer pass students who merely 'worked hard.'"
>
> "There were no previous exit criteria, and I am generally satisfied with the WAT. Those who fail generally deserve to and the test serves to motivate (scare) students into working harder. Queens has a reasonable appeal system in the case of an unanticipated failure."
>
> "WAT is an excellent test. Its success depends on the selection of compelling questions--so those writing the test should continue to choose

Table 13. Distribution of Responses to the Use of the WAT as an Exit Test for Remedial Writing Course Sequence

(N = 226)

	N	%
Don't know	46	20
Same effectiveness as previous test	26	12
More effective than previous test	81	36
Less effective than previous test	56	25
Better than previous test in some ways, but worse in other ways	17	7
	226	100%

questions of general and wide interest to students."

"I do not think that the WAT is a valuable test for exit to 'college-level' courses. The time in which students are expected to achieve so-called minimum proficiency (about 13 weeks) is ridiculous considering the levels at which students begin. Also, at my college traditional English department teachers have proved inconsistent in their scoring. Since they are comparably inexperienced in the 'teaching of writing' they tend to score on 'how they would like students to write' rather than by adhering to the CUNY WAT Task Force's more liberal guidelines."

"It's a poor exit tool because it does not test the student's ability to write without time constraints or in other rhetorical modes. More importantly, the student often feels unfairly treated if he is required to write more difficult essays during the term than he has to write for exit, and we teachers do not have enough time to drill for the WAT and teach other kinds of writing as well."

"Little difference. The major change is having a CUNY-wide exam as the 'fall guy' rather than a departmentally-produced test. Blame, or guilt, is passed on."

"Hard to answer in terms of effectiveness, since it's the influence of the test on curriculum that, in my view, weighs against its use. Disregarding that factor, however, I'd say the test is effective as an 'exit instrument,' God save the mark."

"Again, I don't know what the previous criteria was. But, as a teacher of ESL remedial courses, I can tell you that a 50-minute essay/exam is not the best indication of how well--or even how characteristically--these students write."

"In the classes at Brooklyn College it was effective since the writing component was stressed. But at LaGuardia, where other skills are stressed as well, a combined writing, grammar and listening exit exam is more effective."

"We always used an essay with a 2nd anonymous reading. Results have not differed greatly except more ESL students fail than before."

Now that the WAT has been used to assess students' writing skills for four years at CUNY, we can examine its impact on teachers' curricula, methodology, or attitudes toward teaching writing at CUNY.

Approximately 70% of the respondents who teach remedial writing courses answered the first question about the changes they have made due to the WAT (or more precisely, due to the fact that the WAT now serves as the final exam for most of their courses). Approximately half of them wrote that they have not made any changes in the nature or in the frequency of their writing assignments because of the WAT (see Table 14). They wrote that they still assign mostly "narratives," "descriptions," and "analyses":

> "No change. Students write approximately 7 essays in addition to doing formal exercises on usage. The earliest ones may be no more than a paragraph in length. The types include autobiographical narrative, narrative summaries of TV plots (an exercise in controlling tense), supporting a point of view with reasons, how-to exposition, comparison-contrast, response to a written selection, plus miscellaneous other types--letters, descriptions, etc."
>
> "Follow rhetorical modes; do journals and on-the-spot written work designed to integrate classwork with out-of-class experience on a holistic basis."
>
> "WAT does not affect content of my course. Early assignments--freewriting, short descriptions, narratives. Later on--comparison, argumentation."
>
> "No change because of WAT--I assign descriptive and narrative essays as well as persuasive essays (arguments)."

Table 14. Distribution of Responses about the Effects of the WAT on Teachers' Writing Assignments (N = 193)

	N	%
Because of the WAT, I		
assign more WAT-type assignments	58	30%
assign fewer readings	6	3
assign more argumentative essays toward the end of the semester	37	19
have made no changes	92	48
	193	100%

> "All that have been identified (reports, narratives, descriptions, analyses, and arguments). Students expect that they be taught to the test! It's their need created by the WAT. And too many instructors surrender."
>
> "I refuse to teach to the WAT. I assign as broad a range of modes and types of assignments as I did before the WAT."

Six teachers (about 3%) felt that in order to prepare students to pass the WAT, they had to assign more writing and fewer readings than they used to assign:

> "Before the WAT, I assigned many readings (fiction and nonfiction) for my students to respond to in their essays. Now I feel pressured to assign more (and consequently, shorter) essays in order to get them used to writing without the help of a reading stimulus."

Approximately 30% of the respondents wrote that they assign more essays on WAT-type questions (i.e., "agree/ disagree" with a statement about a social issue) throughout the semester in order to prepare students for the WAT:

> "I probably assign argumentative papers to be written in class to the exclusion of much else simply because the WAT has to be prepared for. Students have to develop a technique for doing a 50-minute paper. Of course that type of paper has nothing to do with what the writing process is all about and, indeed, contradicts it. Are we doing our students a disservice???"
>
> "The WAT has, alas, changed my teaching so that the main function of the course is now to train the students to write a WAT-like essay. The 'cookie-cutter method' of English Comp., I calls [sic.] it. That is, it focuses on the appearance of organization, the semblance of thought--(an often vacuous) formalism that passes for 'thinking.'"
>
> "Yes, the WAT has affected my writing assignments: I assign many more agree/disagree essays to help prepare students to pass the final. But this has

> been a very positive strategy because most of my students are writing more often and better than they ever did before! (Of course, I'm also working much harder.)
>
> "I give more persuasive essays now (in the WAT format) but I encourage students to use all of the modes in their arguments."
>
> "Yes! Almost all of my assignments are like the WAT, and I hate myself for giving them, but my students have to pass it."
>
> "I teach them only basic expository prose writing in the WAT essay form: main idea and support. En route they are taught (I didn't say they learned) organization, grammar, syntax, usage, punctuation, etc.; but, more importantly, how to think--to identify their ideas and express them rationally."

Thirty-seven respondents (19%) answered that while they do not "teach to the test," they do assign more argumentative or persuasive essays usually toward the end of the semester:

> "I begin with narration & description & then move on to argumentative & analytic topics. Because of the WAT, I introduce the argumentative paper much earlier in the course & spend more time on it than I used to do."
>
> "I begin with description and narration, then enumeration, followed by analysis which includes a book report on one or two chapters from a work of nonfiction (fiction is handled in another course), then comparison and contrast. I used to give definition but now spend the last two to three weeks on argument as preparation for WAT."

Thus, about half of the respondents have not made changes in their assignments because of the WAT, and about half have started assigning more in-class argumentative or WAT-type essays to help students master the skills required on the WAT (the final exam).

About 73% percent of the respondents who teach remedial writing courses answered the final question about the overall impact of the WAT. Approximately a third of the respondents

wrote that the WAT has not had much of an impact on their curricula or methods (see Table 15):

> "I taught my students how to write well before WAT, and I'm still teaching them the same things. And I downplay the WAT, and most of them pass it."
>
> "No impact on my previous curriculum or teaching methods because WAT imposes standards I've always maintained for college English, whether R or NR. WAT exit standards, however, are not as high as I'd like them to be."
>
> "No dramatic changes because WAT confirmed rather than challenged structure of our basic skills courses. One result has been a considerable increase in the number of incoming students assigned to remediation."
>
> "The WAT merely reinforces what I have always done. Thus it does not alter how I teach. The WAT seems to have more impact on the Registrar (since student placement is based on WAT scores) than on day-to-day life in the English Dept."
>
> "The WAT has had no impact on my curricula. I feel a standard writing skills assessment test is necessary. When a student understands how to organize a composition, how to write correctly, and how to state and develop an idea, he can write well on the WAT. The idea, I believe, is to prepare a young person to write effectively, a skill he will need for the rest of his life. The WAT merely shows me if I have accomplished my goals."
>
> "It [WAT] has not [had an impact]. WAT is a good idea, though many of its details are flawed."
>
> "I try to ignore it [the WAT]."

About a quarter of the respondents wrote that the major impact of the WAT has been its effect on the nature of their writing assignments:

> "I try to keep the WAT impact down to a minimum. Not to do so would be to teach my course in the way some high school teachers do--gearing everything to the Regents exam. Yet, unhappily, I do give a number of in-class essays, which reproduce the innocuous-type questions typical of the WAT."

Table 15. Distribution of Reponses about the Impact of the WAT on Teachers' Curricula, Methods, and Materials

(N = 199)

	N	%
Because of the WAT, I		
teach to the test	31	15%
have changed the nature of my writing assignments	53	26
have changed the frequency of my writing assignments	7	4
have changed the standards I use to evaluate writing	14	7
see the changes in faculty and administrative reactions to students' writing problems	13	7
see changes in students' feelings about writing	13	7
have made no changes	68	34
	199	100%

> "The only impact has been in the new emphasis on argument in response to a quotation. I feel this is less sophisticated than the review assignment, but I do repetitions of the mode to help otherwise competent, but highly fearful, students become comfortable enough to argue under pressure."
>
> "In the past, I gave blocks of time to sentences, then to paragraphs, and to errors in both areas. We spent much time in and out of class combining sentences, etc. I saw progress, but not enough in a short time of one semester. Since I have concentrated on the essay, allowing instruction on paragraphs and sentences to emanate from my focus on the essay, I find students to be more responsive in trying and in their output. Their efforts are also qualitatively better."

Approximately 15% answered that they now teach directly to the test. However, as an examination of the sample replies below makes clear, each teacher's conception of "teaching to the WAT" seems different:

> "The WAT has had a big impact on my methodology. I teach directly to the test--I give frequent, full-length, in-class essay assignments. Because of this, we spend much more time on writing rather than on grammar or mechanics. Also, my students are improving their ability to provide logical reasons for assertions thanks to WAT practice."
>
> "Of course it [the WAT] has [had an impact]! Mainly, whether we like it or not, we 'teach to the test' and break our hearts over the cold fact that for students coming out of ESL programs, as so much of our population is, passing the WAT does not mean anything more than that--true proficiency is not really tested, just one kind of proficiency... Ultimately, the worst enemy the WAT has is statistics. When it becomes a matter of getting students to pass no matter how, the integrity of the purpose behind the test is defeated. Personally, I can say that the WAT has made me structure my materials around rhetoric in a way I never did before, and pay as much attention to it as I paid to grammar."
>
> "I teach only argumentative essays because of the WAT. My students write so poorly that I emphasize one type of essay. I find that my students need

to write and rewrite essays just to prepare for the final (the WAT)."

"Because of the WAT, I must spend a great deal of time in the second half of the term drilling students in preparation for it. (We use most of one class period each week to write a mock WAT essay.) I have also devised several strategies for helping students do well on a 50-minute essay test, such as looking for the subdivisions of their essays in the essay question itself. Many of these strategies are expedient, but not very helpful when students have to create an essay out of whole cloth for other class assignments. Also, the stress I put on prewriting & proofreading activities early in a term tend [sic] to get forgotten by students oppressed by that 50-minute exit. Few are willing to stop writing 10 minutes early to proofread, and some others can't wait to start writing because they are nervous, so all brainstorming, selecting & arranging activities are forgotten too."

"WAT has made my teaching more purposeful and efficient. Now I emphasize writing more than grammar, and proofreading more than isolated grammar exercises. The students write essays five paragraphs long according to a formula. The reason for these changes was to increase the pass rate of my students on the WAT, which we use as the exit exam for remedial courses."

And seven teachers (4%) stated that the WAT had affected the frequency of their writing assignments:

"I give more in-class essays now to prepare students for the actual experience of taking the WAT test. I try to help them to organize, outline, and begin to write quickly under pressure."

Fourteen teachers (7%) felt the WAT's impact on their standards for evaluating students' writing rather than on the nature or the frequency of their assignments:

"The WAT helped me to distinguish more carefully between levels of writing, and to see more clearly the way to separate the 3-3's from the 4-4's, especially. I think I am now a better judge of student writing."

"I can now be more style-concerned and less grammar- concerned in my basic writing classes, and I feel that CUNY will catch them if my own standards wobble."

The WAT has also influenced the attitudes of faculty and of administrators toward students' writing problems:

"I feel that WAT has relegated me (and most other teachers) to a position of powerlessness. Our judgment and expertise is no longer asked for and, consequently, respected. We have become keepers instead of teachers of writing, who could, at best, engage students in the writing/thinking process."

"In a more general way, it has had a profound impact (1) on the number of remedial courses offered, & (2) in the nitty-gritty way these have been forced to focus on basic problems. I think the Department has been forced to deal more with grammatical problems, for instance, than its members might have heretofore."

"We have revised our remedial/corrective syllabi, and have tracked our students into those who have passed the WAT and those who have not. We felt that those who had not passed were not being given sufficient attention or those who had were bored. So our below-std. fr. comp. courses are now tracked."

And thirteen teachers (7%) wrote about the impact of the WAT on students' attitudes:

"WAT has been important for demonstrating to our students that there is a writing standard they must attain to graduate. Students have become more serious about their writing."

"Was developing courses around themes so the students would have something to write about & would learn about the subject while writing. Students' fears of the test, & need to practice timed writing on a bland topic have severely cut into that. Too bad."

"The specific structure & grading standards of the WAT give a clear external goal toward which students and instructor can proceed cooperatively. The test seems as reasonable an entry gate as could be devised for college composition, and I

> present it to my students in that light. The reality of the test, thus explained and thus deployed, gives a point and even urgency to the numerous matters that we must deal with in this course."

Thus, about a third of the respondents do not feel that the WAT has had much of an impact on their curricula and methods or on their students; about half feel that the WAT's major impact has been on the nature and frequency of their writing assignments; and the remainder feel that the WAT has affected their standards or other teachers' reactions to students' writing problems or students' feelings about writing.

Overall, the majority of the respondents believe that the WAT is an effective placement test and about half feel it is an effective exit test for the remedial sequence (20% said that they do not know enough about the test to judge its effectiveness as an exit test). Although the WAT's objective is to establish a standard in writing which all CUNY students must meet before their junior year, these respondents indicate that it is also suitable for placing students in remediation and for determining student readiness for freshman composition.

The respondents' feelings about the WAT are largely positive--faculty cite its "accuracy," "reliability," and "rigorous, uniform grading procedures"--except for the responses of the ESL teachers who feel that additional placement and exit tools are necessary for ESL students. While some respondents did discuss problems in the use of the WAT as a remediation exit test (specifically the 50-minute time limit and the single rhetorical mode), it should be noted that colleges are free to require a

departmental exit test in place of or in addition to the WAT if enough faculty and administrators so desire it.

Finally, I was very surprised to discover that almost half the respondents asserted that the WAT has not had any impact on the nature or the frequency of their writing assignments and that more than a third of them stated that the WAT has had no impact on their programs, curricula, methods, or attitudes. Where the impact of the WAT has been felt, according to approximately half the respondents, is on instruction: teachers are assigning more in-class argumentative essays than they did prior to the WAT and are spending less time teaching grammar. And several respondents also wrote that the WAT has led to an increase in the number and types of remedial writing courses, to the tightening of teachers' standards for grading writing, and to the student belief that writing is valued at CUNY. Thus, CUNY writing faculty seem to have come to terms with their standardized university-wide writing test and seem to have reached some consensus about using the test results meaningfully.

DISCUSSION

A major purpose of this study was to determine the validity of the trends observed in the 1976 and the 1981 surveys of CUNY writing programs. The results of the survey reported here substantiate many of the observations made in both earlier surveys.

First, the majority of the responding teachers indicated that writing instruction at CUNY is the responsibility of experienced full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty in English or in basic skills departments. This finding is open to several interpretations: the survey respondents may not be representative of the entire population or there may not be enough literature courses for tenured professors to teach. And there is certainly no evidence to show that full-time tenured faculty make better writing teachers than do part-time lecturers. Nevertheless, the fact remains that most of the survey respondents do share a long-term commitment to teaching at CUNY, and part of that commitment includes teaching introductory and remedial writing courses.

In fact, the average semester courseload of the majority of the full-time respondents includes between 50% and 100% remedial writing courses. In other words, experienced permanent faculty account for a good deal of remedial writing instruction. Much of this instruction occurs in classes with class sizes small enough (16-25 students) to permit teachers to assign and to respond to students' writing. It should be noted, however, that one quarter

of the respondents teach classes of 26-35 students. I (and many other teachers and researchers) believe that such large class sizes make it very difficult to provide individual feedback on students' writing.

The data from this survey also support the findings of the earlier surveys that showed that CUNY writing teachers are assigning writing frequently and are placing more emphasis on the process and the content of writing assignments and less emphasis on the teaching of grammar. The majority of the current survey respondents require their students to do some type of in-class writing once or twice every week. And the type of writing that they most frequently assign to both remedial and non-remedial courses is the short (1-3 page) essay. These emphases on regular in-class writing and on skills instruction in essay development are probably due, in large part, to the fact that all CUNY writing teachers are aware that student writing proficiency at CUNY is assessed by an expository essay test (the WAT).

Indeed, perhaps the fact that students in non-remedial writing courses have already shown that they can write a minimally competent short expository essay (i.e., they have passed the WAT) accounts for the finding that these students are assigned a wider variety of types of writing than are students in the respondents' remedial courses. Non-remedial writing students are asked to write letters, editorials, abstracts, reviews, and research papers (in addition to short essays) whereas the respondents' remedial students write mostly short essays.

As the authors of the earlier surveys noted, writing instruction varies from campus to campus and from course level to course level. However, the uniformity in the methods and techniques of CUNY writing teachers that was also reported in the earlier surveys is even more apparent in this survey. The majority of the current survey respondents reported that they provide specific instructions about the purpose, the techniques for development, and the format of their assignments for both their remedial and non-remedial courses, and about half the respondents wrote that they also give specific instructions about the number of drafts that they expect students to do.

About three-quarters of the respondents provide specific instructions about outlining and revising writing assignments. Yet, outlining may be a useless or even a counterproductive technique because students often discover the relationships among their ideas as they elaborate upon them in writing. Doing an outline first may inhibit that elaboration by creating a rigid structure or an artificial closure. On the other hand, if teachers are encouraging students to outline after they have composed their ideas, the technique can help them sort out their ideas, clarify the connections, and see the need for providing more details. Similarly, revising can be a counterproductive technique if teachers and students conceive of it as copy-editing or proofreading. Or revision can be a valuable tool if students use it to reconceive their ideas and the development and organization of these ideas.

Another interesting finding of this survey concerns what seems to be contradictory teacher feedback. The majority of the respondents reported that they write extensive commentary on students' papers and that much of this commentary focuses on grammatical and syntactic errors. Yet when these respondents were asked to consider students' writing problems in terms of how each problem affects their judgment of writing quality, they indicated that the problem concerning them most is inadequate development of ideas in their students' papers. Thus, many of these teachers may be giving their students contradictory messages about writing: they may be talking about the importance of logical development and organization, but the actual content of their written feedback seems to consist mostly of correction of errors in grammar, syntax, and mechanics.

However, I must note again, here, that the mode of inquiry which I used to survey instructional practices (the anonymous questionnaire) limits the kinds of inferences that I can make about their responses. The results of this survey reveal general instructional patterns among several hundred teachers but we do not have information about the details of these patterns. For example, the majority of the survey respondents believe in the value of outlining and of revising, but classroom observation and experimental investigation is needed to determine how these techniques are actually being used, and whether students find either of these techniques useful or helpful.

Another example of this problem in drawing conclusions from these data concerns the finding that the majority of the

respondents always write comments on their students' papers and that these comments focus on errors and on ways of correcting these errors. In order to make any inferences about the nature, the value, or the consequences of these comments and corrections, I would have to interview a representative sample of the teachers, observe their in-class behavior, examine their responses to students' writing, and analyze the students' revisions.

One major conclusion that can be drawn from this survey's data on teachers' instructional practices is that the respondents have an enormous paperload. The majority of them are teaching three or four writing courses with 16-25 students in each course and are assigning weekly writing assignments which they correct and comment upon. In other words, most of them read and respond to approximately 1,000 papers a semester; and one quarter of them read more than 2,600 a semester. If these respondents are at all similar to the larger population of CUNY writing faculty (and if their responses accurately mirror their behavior), then a considerable amount of reading and writing is being done by CUNY composition students and by their teachers.

A further conclusion is that the majority of the survey respondents use strikingly similar instructional practices for their remedial and their non-remedial composition students. And the three sub-groups (those who teach only remedial courses, only non-remedial courses, or both types) reported that they use similar approaches and techniques in their composition courses. The only differences in instructional practices reported by the

sub-groups involved the frequency of their assignments (remedial students write more frequently than do non-remedial students) and the severity of students' writing problems (the grammatical and sentence structure errors made by remedial students are more serious than those made by non-remedial students).

Teachers who teach only remedial courses assign writing more frequently than do teachers who teach only non-remedial courses, and teachers who teach both types assign writing more frequently to their remedial courses. Yet these respondents reported that they assign a wider variety of types of assignments to their non-remedial composition students. In addition, teachers of remedial students reported that problems in grammar and in sentence structure marred the quality of their students papers more often than did teachers of non-remedial students.

These findings suggest that teaching remedial and non-remedial composition at CUNY may be similar experiences. Many of the survey respondents use similar instructional techniques and have similar perceptions of the skills that their students must improve. In both types of courses, teachers try to help students organize their ideas coherently, present these ideas with sufficient depth of detail, and prepare their writing for other readers.

Perhaps the teachers may have a fixed conception of and structure for teaching a composition course and do not deviate from it regardless of the skills and the experiences of their students. I would think it more likely, as a composition teacher, to assume these teachers believe that the basic

approaches to teaching writing do not vary much--that all students need to write frequently, to follow clearly stated objectives, to master a hierarchy of skills as these are needed in the processes of their writing, and to receive abundant appropriate feedback. Until we conduct further research, we have no way of knowing which of these interpretations is closer more accurate. All that we can say, based on the data of this survey, is that the instructional and the curricular activities of many of the responding teachers are similar for their remedial and their non-remedial composition courses.

We can, however, draw more precise conclusions about the respondents' beliefs about the CUNY WAT. The majority reported that they believe the WAT to be an effective instrument for determining placement into the sequence of writing courses at their colleges, and about half reported that the WAT is an effective instrument for determining exit from their remedial course sequences. Again, it must be noted that the college faculties adopted the WAT for use as a placement and as an exit tool; the Board mandated it for the assessment of minimum writing competency for entrance into the upper divisions of the colleges. The majority of the respondents are pleased with the WAT's accuracy and reliability as a writing assessment tool, although the ESL teachers cited the need for additional placement and exit tests for ESL students.

Despite the fact that the WAT has been in place for almost five years and is used as the remedial course exit test at so many of the colleges, it seems to have had surprisingly little

impact on the syllabi or the assignments of about half the respondents. In my opinion, this finding is the most interesting and unexpected one in the entire set of survey data, and I am still not sure what it means. Do these teachers simply ignore the WAT? Do they assume that their pre-WAT techniques and assignments would prepare students for any type of writing test? Do they make changes without consciously acknowledging these changes? Their responses suggest that all of these explanations may be accurate.

Where the impact of the WAT has been felt, according to about half the respondents, is on instruction. These teachers reported that they now assign more in-class argumentative essays than they did prior to the WAT and that they spend less class time on grammar and on readings than they used to spend.

About a sixth of the respondents answered that they teach directly to the WAT, but the content of their responses made it clear that they had very different conceptions of "teaching to the test." Some construed this to mean reviewing previous WAT questions and reported that they assign only WAT-type essays while others believe that it means assigning writing in a variety of rhetorical modes and teaching essay organization and development. The latter interpretation seems more sensible to me; the former seems too narrow--students and teachers must surely get bored doing one assignment over and over all semester. The assumption that the best way to prepare students for a writing test is to continually replicate its questions is a debatable assumption that needs further research.

Several respondents also mentioned other influences of the WAT--it has led to the creation of more writing courses, to more uniformity in teachers' evaluative standards, and to the student belief that writing is valued at CUNY.

These teachers' responses concerning the WAT raise many interesting questions for further investigation. What kinds of writing assignments improve students' writing performance? Which types of prewriting and revising strategies help students write more fluently and more correctly? How do different writing assignments and different teaching methods affect students' performance on the WAT? Can the WAT be "taught to?" If so, how, and what are the effects of WAT test-taking training on students' skills and on their attitudes toward writing?

Clearly, the university-wide testing program has fostered a commonality of effort among the hundreds of composition teachers at CUNY. What we need to do now is to conduct further research on the relationships between the teaching and the testing of writing at CUNY. We also need more frequent university-wide conferences of composition teachers; these would enable us to discuss the issues and the questions raised by this report, to explore problems and solutions, and to share ideas and techniques.

Furthermore, we must continue to share information about students' writing processes, about our instructional practices, and about our evaluation procedures with our colleagues in high schools and in colleges across the country. That this exchange of information is of national importance is illustrated by the

recent funding of two multi-year projects on writing instruction and evaluation by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). One of these projects, The Writing Program Assessment Project at the University of Texas at Austin, currently is examining the curricular and the instructional practices of college teachers in order to develop instruments for describing and for assessing effective writing instruction behaviors. And the other, the National Testing Network in Writing (NTNW) at the City University of New York, is creating a nationwide clearinghouse of information and materials on writing evaluation and assessment. It is publishing two newsletters focusing on issues of writing assessment at the post-secondary level. And it is organizing a national conference to facilitate communication about the teaching and testing of writing among teachers and administrators (March 3-5, 1983 in New York City). Following the conference, a monograph will be published.

These projects, and other national and local efforts, reflect the widespread concern about students' writing abilities and about the ways in which writing is taught and is evaluated in American colleges and universities. The more information we learn about the processes of writing and about the procedures of writing instruction and evaluation, the more competent we may become in serving the needs of our students and our institutions.

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The City University of New York APPENDIX A

Instructional Resource Center

535 East 80 Street, New York, N.Y. 10021

Room 404 (212) 794-5425

April 29, 1981

Dear CUNY Faculty Member:

We would like to obtain information from CUNY faculty about the type of writing which is required of CUNY students. In order to do this, we need a few minutes of your time to give us some information about your writing assignments and your students' writing skills.

The results of this survey will illuminate areas of mutual concern about students' writing and will identify the actual writing requirements which students in CUNY must face. Your cooperation will help all of us to establish clear standards for students' writing.

Please fill out the enclosed questionnaire completely, but do not put your name anywhere on it. No record of individual responses to the questionnaire will be made; all data will be presented in groups. This survey is being conducted for research purposes only by the Instructional Resource Center of CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs. Please return the completed questionnaire by inter-campus mail no later than May 29, 1981.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Respectfully,

Karen L. Greenberg

Professor Karen L. Greenberg
English Department
Hunter College

CUNY WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to gather some information about (1) the types of writing which students do in your courses, (2) your students' writing skills, and (3) the impact of the CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test.

This information will be used for research purposes only. All results will be presented as group data; thus, the confidentiality of your response is assured.

Please indicate your answers to the questions by placing a check mark or an X in the box beside the best answer. The numbers which appear beside answer categories and in parentheses should be ignored. They are included only to assist the processing of your answers.

Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please call me (Dr. Greenberg) at 570-5076.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. At which branch(es) of CUNY do you teach?

Baruch..... 1 [ ]		BMCC..... 10 [ ]	
Brooklyn..... 2 [ ]		Bronx..... 11 [ ]	
City..... 3 [ ]		Hostos..... 12 [ ]	
Hunter..... 4 [ ]		Kingsborough..... 13 [ ]	
John Jay..... 5 [ ]		La Guardia..... 14 [ ]	
Lehman..... 6 [ ]		Medgar Evers..... 15 [ ]	
Queens..... 7 [ ]		NYC Technical..... 16 [ ]	
Staten Island..... 8 [ ]		Queensborough..... 17 [ ]	
York..... 9 [ ]			(5-6)

2. Are you a full-time or adjunct teacher at the above branch(es) of CUNY?

full-time..... 1 [ ]	adjunct..... 2 [ ]
	(7)

3. What is your present rank?

Lecturer..... 1 [ ]		Associate Professor... 4 [ ]	
Instructor..... 2 [ ]		Professor..... 5 [ ]	
Assistant Professor.. 3 [ ]		other..... 6 [ ]	
			(8)

4. How many years have you been teaching at the college level?

four or fewer..... 1 [ ]
five to nine..... 2 [ ]
ten to fourteen..... 3 [ ]
fifteen to nineteen... 4 [ ]
twenty or more..... 5 [ ]
(9)

5. How many undergraduate courses do you usually teach each semester?

none..... 1 [ ]
one..... 2 [ ]
two..... 3 [ ]
three..... 4 [ ]
four or more..... 5 [ ]
(10)

6. How many of the undergraduate courses which you teach each semester are introductory courses (i.e., Freshman Composition courses)?

none..... 1 [ ]
one..... 2 [ ]
two..... 3 [ ]
three..... 4 [ ]
four or more..... 5 [ ]
(11)

7. How many of the undergraduate courses which you teach each semester are remedial or compensatory or developmental writing courses?

none..... 1 [ ]
one..... 2 [ ]
two..... 3 [ ]
three..... 4 [ ]
four or more..... 5 [ ]
(12)

8. How many of the undergraduate courses which you teach each semester are designed specifically for bilingual and/or English-as-a-Second Language students?

none..... 1 [ ]
one..... 2 [ ]
two..... 3 [ ]
three..... 4 [ ]
four or more..... 5 [ ]
(13)

9. What is the average number of students <u>per course</u> which you teach?

fifteen or fewer..... 1 [ ]
sixteen to twenty-five..... 2 [ ]
twenty-six to thirty-five.. 3 [ ]
thirty-six to forty-five.. 4 [ ]
forty-six or more..... 5 [ ]
(14)

10. In what field are <u>most</u> of the courses which you teach?

Humanities/Arts..... 1 [ ]
Social Sciences..... 2 [ ]
Education..... 3 [ ]
Physical Sciences/Math.... 4 [ ]
Health Sciences..... 5 [ ]
(15)

INFORMATION ON WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

If you teach remedial and non-remedial writing courses, please answer questions 11-20 for both types of courses (remedial=R; non-remedial=NR).

11. How many times per week are students in your typical course required to do a writing assignment?

	1 never	2 once	3 twice	4 three times	5 four or more times	
remedial (R).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
non-remedial (NR).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(16)

12. How many times per semester are students in your typical course required to do each of the following types of writing assignments?

	1 never	2 once	3 twice	4 three times	5 four or more times	
1-3 page theme/essay.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(17)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(18)
4-8 page theme/essay.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(19)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(20)
9 or more page theme/essay..	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(21)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(22)
abstract/summary.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(23)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(24)
review/critique.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(25)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(26)
journal/log.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(27)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(28)
research proposal.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(29)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(30)
research paper.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(31)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	R[ ]	NR[ ]	(32)
other_____...	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(33)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(34)

13. How specific are your instructions in each of the following areas?

	1 specify at great length	2 specify briefly	3 do not specify at all	
format.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(35)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(36)
length.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(37)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(38)
purpose.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(39)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(40)
audience.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(41)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(42)
techniques for development.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(43)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(44)
reference sources.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(45)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(46)
number of drafts.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(47)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(48)

14. How often do you encourage your students to outline before they write?

	1 never	2 seldom	3 frequently	4 always	
remedial (R).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(49)
non-remedial (NR).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(50)

15. How often do you require students to rewrite an unsatisfactory paper?

	1 never	2 seldom	3 frequently	4 always	
remedial (R).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(51)
non-remedial (NR).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(52)

16. How seriously does each of the following problems affect the quality of your students' writing?

	1 substantially mars quality	2 slightly mars quality	3 has little effect on quality	
lack of details.....	R [ ]	R [ ]	R [ ]	(53)
	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	NR[ ]	(54)

	1 substantially mars quality	2 slightly mars quality	3 has little effect on quality
inadequate development.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (55) NR[ ] (56)
weak organization.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (57) NR[ ] (58)
lack of coherence.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (59) NR[ ] (60)
grammar/usage errors.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (61) NR[ ] (62)
sentence structure errors.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (63) NR[ ] (64)
spelling/punctuation errors.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (65) NR[ ] (66)
diction/vocabulary errors.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (67) NR[ ] (68)
improper format.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (69) NR[ ] (70)
improper use of sources.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (71) NR[ ] (72)
other_____...	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (73) NR[ ] (74)

17. How often do you use each of the following methods for dealing with your students' writing problems?

	1 never	2 seldom	3 frequently	4 always
individual student conferences..	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (75) NR[ ] (76)
in-class instruction.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (77) NR[ ] (78)
comments on papers	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (79) NR[ ] (80)
referral to a Writing Lab.....	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (81) NR[ ] (82)
other_____...	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] NR[ ]	R [ ] (83) NR[ ] (84)

18. How much commentary do you write on your students' papers?

	1 none	2 a few words	3 a few sentences	4 a paragraph or more	
remedial (R).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(85)
non-remedial (NR).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(86)

19. How much correcting of errors do you do on your students' papers?

	1 none	2 correct some errors	3 correct all errors	4 identify but do not correct errors	
remedial (R).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(87)
non-remedial (NR).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(88)

20. How would you describe the writing abilities of the students in your courses during the past few years?

	1 very good	2 good	3 adequate	4 poor	5 very poor	
remedial (R).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(89)
non-remedial (NR).....	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	(90)

If you do not teach remedial/compensatory/developmental writing courses, then this is the end of the questionnaire for you. Thank you very much for your time and help.

If you do teach remedial/compensatory/developmental writing courses, please fill out the following questions about the CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test. Thank you.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CUNY WRITING SKILLS ASSESSMENT TEST
(hereafter abbreviated as the WAT)

21. In which department do you teach your remedial/compensatory/ developmental courses?

English..... 1 [ ]
Writing and/or Speech.... 2 [ ]
Basic Educational Skills. 3 [ ]
SEEK/Academic Skills... 4 [ ]
Other_____... 5 [ ]

(91)

Please answer the following questions in the space below each question. If you need more room, please continue your answers on the back of each page.

22. If the WAT is used for placement purposes at your college, how effective is it as a placement instrument as compared to the previous placement test or critiera?

23. If the WAT is used as an exit test for the remedial writing sequence at your college, how effective is it as an exit instrument as compared to the previous exit test or criteria?

24. Please describe the types of compositions you assign to your remedial writing students (i.e., reports, narratives, descriptions, analyses, arguments, etc.). In addition, if you have changed the nature and/or frequency of these assignments because of the WAT, please describe these changes and the reasons for making them.

25. If the WAT had had an impact on your curricula, teaching methods, tests, or materials, please describe the changes you have made and the reasons for making them.

The End. Thank you for your patience!

Sponsored by The Instructional Resource Center
Office of Academic Affairs, CUNY
1981

APPENDIX B

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

WRITING SKILLS ASSESSMENT TEST

DIRECTIONS

You will have fifty minutes to plan and write the essay assigned below. (You may wish to use your fifty minutes in the following way: 10 minutes planning what you are going to write; 30 minutes writing; 10 minutes rereading and correcting what you have written.)

You should express your thoughts clearly and organize your ideas so that they will make sense to a reader. Correct grammar and sentence structure are important.

Write your essay on the lined pages of your booklet. You may use the inside of the front cover of the booklet for preliminary notes.

You must write your essay on one of the following assignments. Read each one carefully and then choose either A or B.

A. It always strikes me as a terrible shame to see young people spending so much of their time staring at television. If we could unplug all the TV sets in America, our children would grow up to be healthier, better educated, and more independent human beings.

Do you agree or disagree? Explain and illustrate your answer from your own experience, your observations of others, or your reading.

B. Older people bring to their work a lifetime of knowledge and experience. They should not be forced to retire, even if keeping them on the job cuts down on the opportunities for young people to find work.

Do you agree or disagree? Explain and illustrate your answer from your own experience, your observations of others, or your reading.

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

FRESHMAN SKILLS ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Writing Skills Assessment Test Evaluation Scale

6

The essay is competently organized and the ideas are expressed in appropriate language. A sense of pattern of development is present from beginning to end. The writer supports assertions with explanation or illustrations.

Sentences reflect a command of syntax within the ordinary range of standard written English. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are generally correct.

5 - 4

The writer introduces some point or idea and demonstrates an awareness that development or illustration is called for.

The essay presents a discernible pattern of organization, even if there are occasional digressions.

The essay demonstrates sufficient command of vocabulary to convey, without serious distortion or excessive simplification, the range of the writer's ideas.

Sentences reflect a sufficient command of syntax to ensure reasonable clarity of expression. The writer generally avoids both the monotony of rudimentary syntax and the incoherence created by tangled syntax.

The writer demonstrates through punctuation an understanding of the boundaries of the sentence.

The writer spells the common words of the language with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Exceptions can be made for the so-called spelling "demons" which frequently trouble even an advanced writer.

The writer shows the ability to use regularly, but not necessarily faultlessly, the common forms of agreement and of grammatical inflection in standard written English.

3 - 2

An idea or point is suggested, but is undeveloped or presented in a purely repetitious way.

The pattern of the essay is somewhat random and relationships between sentences and paragraphs are rarely signaled.

The essay is restricted to a very narrow range of language, so that the vocabulary chosen frequently does not serve the needs of the writer.

The syntax of the essay is not sufficiently stable to ensure reasonable clarity of expression. The syntax often is rudimentary or tangled.

The writer frequently commits errors of punctuation which obscure sentence boundaries.

The writer spells the common words of the language with only intermittent accuracy.

The essay reveals recurrent grammatical problems; if there are only occasional problems, this may be due to the extremely narrow range of syntactical choices the writer has used.

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The essay suffers from general incoherence and has no discernible pattern of organization. It displays a high frequency of error in the regular features of standard written English. Lapses in punctuation, spelling, and grammar often frustrate the reader. Or, the essay is so brief that any reasonably accurate judgment of the writer's competence is impossible.